

# Kansas Football “Over There”

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*by Doran L. Cart*

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**T**he morning of November 11, 1918, dawned with an expectant air, but few outward signs showed along the front lines that an armistice was at hand. Field pieces still sent their steel messages east and west. Then, in a ripple effect along the Allied lines, flimsy field message sheets spread the news. It was the Armistice.

One of those messages, like many others, to the commanding officer of C Battery, 129th Field Artillery, received at 8:24 A.M., read:

Nov. 11 - 1918. Warning Message. Hostilities will cease on whole front at 11 A.M. this morning Nov. 11 - 1918. Troops will not pass the line obtained at that period. Out-guard will be established at that hour and no intercourse with enemy allowed. Line reached will be carefully marked. Enemy soldiers may be received as prisoners but no communication with the enemy will be permitted either before or after cessation of hostilities. Further orders will be sent later.<sup>1</sup>

The terms of the Armistice stated that “evacuation by the German armies of the countries on the left bank of the Rhine” would occur. Occupation of these areas would be accomplished by Allied and United States garrisons “holding the principal crossings of the Rhine: Mayence (French), Coblenz (American, southern sector - French) and Cologne (British)” along with territory of a thirty kilometer radius on the right bank.

Third Army troops soon trudged into the disarmed neutral state of the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg, and on December 1, 1918, advance elements marched from Luxembourg into Germany. The “Watch on the Rhine” was on.

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1. Major Marvin H. Gates, Commanding Officer, 2nd Battalion, 129th Field Artillery, telegram to Captain Theodore Marks, Commanding Officer, C Battery, 129th Field Artillery, Ephemera Collection, National World War I Museum, Kansas City, Mo.

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*Kansas History: A Journal of the Central Plains* 29 (Autumn 2006): 194–199





*An AEF football team "Over There."*

During the postwar occupation of Germany, American unit commanders tried a number of activities to keep the soldiers busy and entertained when not on duty. Besides the ubiquitous drills, sports—football, basketball, indoor baseball, soccer, and boxing—played a major role.

The Eighty-ninth Division, which included many Kansans in its ranks, became a powerhouse of the football competitions in Germany and in games in France. The team was organized in January 1919 and, according to the official *History of the 89<sup>th</sup> Division*, "the Division was combed for men who had shown skill at the game. . . . Although equipment

had not arrived, the men began practice in their O.D. [olive drab] trousers and hob-nailed shoes by the 25th of January, in the snow and slush."<sup>2</sup>

The American Expeditionary Forces (AEF) held a series of football games in March 1919, primarily played in Paris at the Velodrome bicycle racetrack, to determine its football champion. The AEF official newspaper, *The Stars*

2. George H. English Jr., *History of the 89<sup>th</sup> Division* (N.p.: War Society of the 89<sup>th</sup> Division, 1920), 270.





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and Stripes, reported that the "89<sup>th</sup> Division football team fought its way to the highest football honors by winning every game it played."

On March 29, 1919, the Eighty-ninth Division team took on the Thirty-sixth Division for the title. Estimates placed the crowd size at fifteen thousand with General John J. Pershing and other high-ranking officers in attendance.

In the first quarter, the 89<sup>th</sup> worked the ball to the one yard line and on the fourth down tried for a field goal, but the slippery ball went wide. After neither side had gained much advantage in close play in the middle of the field, [the Thirty-sixth Division's kicker, Native American Eddie] Mahseet delivered a terrific punt that carried more than fifty yards and passed the safety man of the 89<sup>th</sup>, who let it roll over the line for a touchback. On the first play [by the Eighty-ninth team], the ball was passed badly to Lindsey, who fumbled and the ball rolled over the line. McCuller fell on it for the first touchdown of the game. Mahseet missed goal [the extra point]. The quarter ended without further scoring.<sup>3</sup>

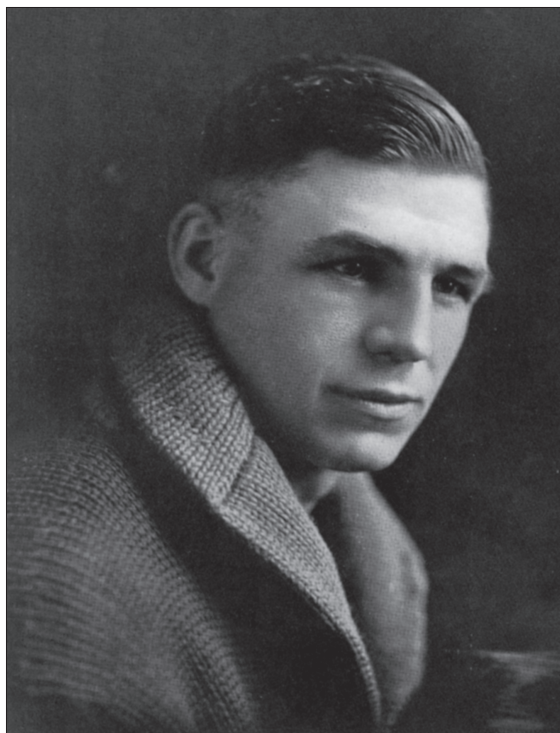
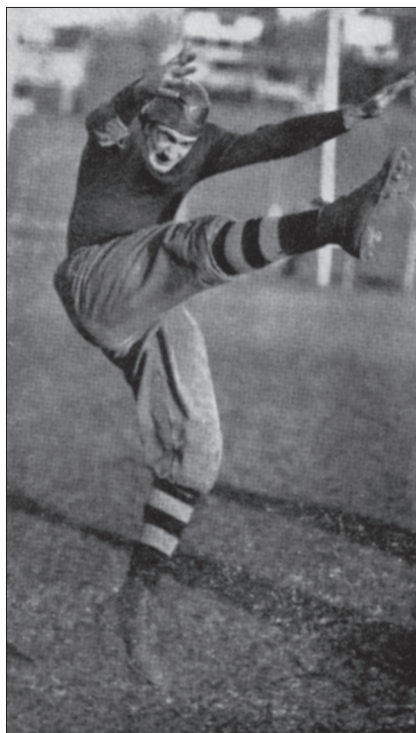
Just before the end of the half, the Thirty-sixth's Sergeant Tolbert blocked a punt by University of Kansas stand-

3. Ibid., 272–73.

out Adrian Lindsey. According to the Eighty-ninth Division official history, the Thirty-sixth Division spectators thought the game was over for they "swarmed on the field for a snake dance."

Olathe soldier Sergeant Charles S. Stevenson, Company A, 314th Engineers, Eighty-ninth Division, documented this football game and in following decades gathered information from a number of other sources, eventually writing an unpublished account of the contest. According to Stevenson, the pivotal moment came during halftime, with the Thirty-sixth holding the six-point lead and the Eighty-ninth players "wet, disconsolate and unmoved by agitated talk from members of the coaching staff and officers from the Division staff. As the men moved out for the second half, General Winn [Eighty-ninth Division commander] suddenly appeared and began talking in a firm, clear and authoritative voice. 'Hold up there,' he roared. 'When General Wood commanded the division, he never issued an order that was not carried out. I too have never issued an order that was not carried out. There is only one thing I can do—order you to win this game.'"<sup>4</sup> Winn's

4. Charles Stevenson, "I Order You to Win This Game' the General Said—and They Did," Sergeant 1st Class Charles Stevenson Collection, 314th Engineers, 89th Division, National World War I Museum.



*From left: Adrian Hobart Lindsey, Howard "Scrubby" Laslett, and George "Potsy" Clark as pictured in the Jayhawker, 1917.*

order evidently inspired the players. Lieutenant Lindsey returned the kickoff forty-one yards.

Stevenson reported that, following a few punts by both teams, "Lt. George Potsy Clark, of the University of Illinois, later to be a coach at the University of Kansas, received a [Lindsey] pass" and "pushed across the line for a touch-down." Clark kicked the extra point. "In the last quarter," Stevenson continued, "young Lieutenant Clark made a sensational 65 yard run which ended in a touchdown also. Now the hero of the day, he kicked his second field goal [extra point] and the 89<sup>th</sup> Division went on to win the championship."

Sergeant Stevenson's papers contain a roster of the Eighty-ninth Division football team, with notes from Adrian "Ad" Lindsey in 1959, detailing where each member played or coached before and after the war. In the following list, the position noted is that played on the Eighty-ninth's team.

Private Howard "Scrubby" Laslett, left end. University of Kansas, 1916-1917, 1919.  
Sergeant Viggio Nelson, fullback. Springfield Teachers College pre-war; Michigan postwar.  
Sergeant Thomas A. Thompson, right tackle. University of South Dakota.

Sergeant Harry E. Flanagan, guard. Played at parochial school but did not attend college.

Lieutenant George "Potsy" Clark, left halfback. Illinois, 1914-1915; assistant head coach, Kansas University, 1916; head coach, Kansas University, postwar.

Lieutenant Adrian H. Lindsey, right halfback. Kansas University 1914-1916; coach, Bethany College, Oklahoma, and Kansas University, postwar.

Lieutenant Grover C. Padfield, fullback. University of St. Louis, 1915-1916.

Lieutenant Carl A. Schweiger, left tackle. Colorado College, 1914-1916; coach, Denver high schools.

Lieutenant Bud Garside, right guard. Colorado College, 1914-1916.

Lieutenant Monroe C. "Page" Lewis, center. Washington University of St. Louis, 1914-1916. Team captain and All-Conference fullback, 1916.

Lieutenant Robert A. Higgins, right end. Penn State, 1915-1916, 1919; head coach, Penn State, postwar.

Lieutenant W.K. Clark, end. Fort Collins, Colorado 1915-1916; Harvard, postwar.

Captain Charles H. Gerhardt was the Eighty-ninth's quarterback. The reserves included Private Walter McGoogan,





*"The field was wet," so Coach Paul Withington's strategy was that Potsy Clark would play fullback as well as left halfback which meant in a closely-played game, we would control the ball."*

lineman; Corporal John Imaly, back; Sergeant Charles E. Barkley, back; Captain Marshall Wilder, back from Kansas State Agricultural College; Lieutenant Harry Scott, lineman; and Captain Claude Fletcher, end.<sup>5</sup>

The Eighty-ninth's head coach and left guard was Major Paul Withington. A medical officer in the 354th Infantry, Withington had been an All-American guard and captain of the Harvard football team. He later was an assistant coach at Harvard, then head coach at Wisconsin and at Columbia University.

In compiling information about the AEF football championship game, Stevenson received an undated, handwritten note from legendary coach Forrest "Phog" Allen telling him to contact Adrian Lindsey in Lawrence for he "was a halfback and he out-punted his opponent, Eddie Mahseet" in the championship game.<sup>6</sup>

In 1962 George "Potsy" Clark wrote to F.W. Scott, secretary of the Eighty-ninth Division Society, describing the famous game, in the third-person:

The field was wet and we were ready. Withington's strategy was that Potsy Clark would play fullback as well as left halfback which meant in a closely-played game, we would control the ball. Clark was shifty enough to pick up the short yardage when needed. This proved to be satisfactory strategy except that in

the last few minutes of the first half, Mahseet punted us back to our goal line and we were forced to punt and we fumbled and the 36th Division recovered.

Clark went on to describe General Winn's pep talk. "That was the spark needed. We were not tired, wet or discouraged. We were thinking of home folks. I was thinking of my mother in Carthage, Illinois and I was not going to have her disappointed in her boy. We won the game 14-6."<sup>7</sup>

An undated newspaper clipping relates "Potsy" Clark's heroics in more glowing terms.

The last five minutes of play. A mud-covered streak of maroon flashes around the left end. He dodges one tackler, he fights off another; he's down to one knee; he wrenches free; he's up and plunging ahead; he's down once more; again he's up and on. Finally only one 36th man is between him and the goal. "Potsy" [sic] hurdles him clean and races across the line to take his place in the highest sun of the loftiest solar system in the football firmament.<sup>8</sup>

Stevenson also used dramatic language in summing up the football game's importance: "the game was a classic example of the spirit of democracy which prevailed among the American troops in that rank was completely forgotten as the players competed for places on the team. . . . The game was the culmination of the effort of General Pershing

5. Roster, 89th Division football team, Stevenson Collection; see also, English, *History of the 89th Division*, 273-74.

6. Forrest Allen to Charles Stevenson, n.d., Stevenson Collection.

7. George Clark to F.W. Scott, 1962, *ibid*.

8. Unidentified newspaper clipping, folder 16b, *ibid*.



*"The game was a classic example of the spirit of democracy which prevailed among the American troops," wrote Charles Stevenson; "rank was completely forgotten as the players competed for places on the team."*

to keep up the morale of the restless soldiers in France, Belgium and Germany at the time."

After the game, Stevenson continued, "the victorious team was given a leave of absence in Cannes and Nice. Upon its return to Trier in Germany, it was entertained by General Winn and his staff and in a similar occasion in the grand ballroom in Kyllberg, the players were given small silver footballs."<sup>9</sup>

9. Ibid.

During the World War the Eighty-ninth Division, including the 353d Infantry "Sunflower" Regiment, held true to its slogan: "Get It Done." As citizen soldiers in a war against tyranny, they fought when called upon and many gave their full sacrifice. With the Armistice, the guns were silenced. The men, still in uniform, quickly turned their thoughts to home and civilian life once again. The football championship gave many members of that unit a reminder of that life. And the "battle" on the gridiron in France gave them one last opportunity as a unit to "Get it Done." [KH]